

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to identify barriers, successes, opportunities and trends in the delivery of services and develop recommendations for program improvement the Kentucky Adult Education Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) retained THOMAS, WARREN + ASSOCIATES (TW+A) to undertake an external evaluation of the 2002-2003 Kentucky Family Literacy Program. Data for the study were gathered from existing state databases; from program administrators, staff, and adult learners using specially designed survey instruments; and from interviews during onsite visits to a sample of 40 programs. The information gathered was analyzed using statistically sound research methods. The recommendations developed were based on the results of the analysis.

Family literacy programs strive to break the intergenerational cycle of under-education and poverty and move families to self-sufficiency by targeting improved literacy for both the parent and the child. Kentucky established the first state funded family literacy program in the nation in the mid-1980s and continued its commitment to family literacy through Department of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) family literacy programs, and more recently, the CPE. The passage of Kentucky Senate Bill 1 in April 2000 led to a 100% increase in funding for family literacy and a proliferation of programs across the state. Program services expanded from 43 counties serving 1,485 families in FY 2000 to 120 programs (one in each county) serving 3,919 families in FY 2003. In 2001, twenty Kentucky Family Literacy Performance Indicators were developed for use in evaluating both the federally funded Even Start program and the DAEL funded family literacy programs.

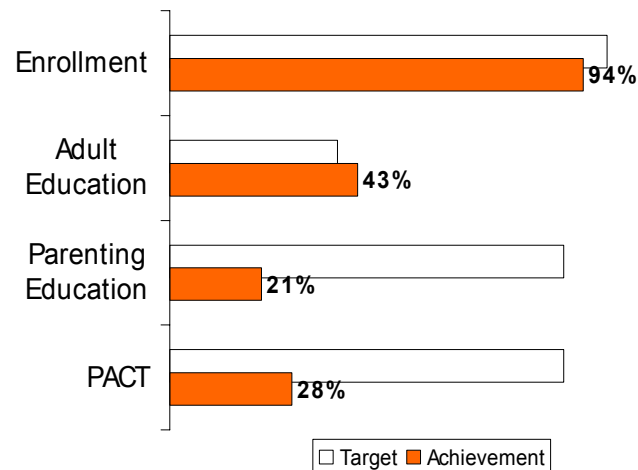
TW+A's evaluation was performed in three phases. The first phase involved the analysis of existing data to categorize the 120 county programs according to various criteria. During the second phase, an electronic survey was designed and administered to the program administrators. The response data were analyzed and used to develop a stratified sampling design to select 40 programs to receive onsite visits. The sampling universe was 109 programs from which 36 programs were chosen at random based on the sampling design. Four additional programs from the four most populous counties in the state were also selected for visits.

The third phase of the evaluation included designing 5 additional data collection instruments, administering the instruments during the onsite visits, and analyzing the collected data using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Two of the instruments, the Teacher Onsite Survey (TOS) and the Adult Learner Survey (ALS), provided the quantitative data used to identify factors associated with program performance. The quantitative analysis used to evaluate this data included a variety of methods to identify statistically significant associations, correlations, regressions, and differences in mean responses. The Administrator Interview Protocol (AIP) provided qualitative data on program implementation.

The State of Kentucky provided guidelines for family literacy program development while giving each county the responsibility to structure its program to fit the needs and interests of its

residents. As a measure of performance, the programs were required to meet the goals outlined in the Kentucky Family Literacy Performance Indicators.¹ For the purpose of this report, indicators of performance were aggregated into four components: enrollment, adult education (includes education achievement, employment, and diploma related goals), parenting education, and PACT. Figure 1 shows the state performance as aggregated for these four components.

Figure 1 ~ State-wide Summary of Goal Achievement by Adult Learners



For the enrollment component, the State established an enrollment target for each county based on the number of people at low levels of literacy in the county. To achieve its goal, each program had to meet 100% of its target. Targets for the adult education component identified the percent of adult learners enrolled for any of the 15 performance indicators who had to meet their performance goal in order for the program goal to be met. These targets ranged from 27% to 48%. Targets for parenting education and PACT identified the percent of parents who had to reach their performance goal for the program goal to be met. The target level of performance required for parenting education and PACT was 90%.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has maintained a 25 year commitment to family literacy. It has been, and continues to be, a widely recognized supporter of family literacy services and exerts a strong national influence. Since the passage of Senate Bill 1 in 2000, the growth and development of the family literacy program has been a witness to the dedication of KYAE's leadership and the providers of literacy services throughout the State. Satisfaction with the family literacy program by participants is further evidence of the success of the program. A large majority of the adult learners who were surveyed felt they had a positive academic experience in the family literacy program; they reported making improvements in reading, writing, and math; and they stated they would recommend the program to other families.

1. Goal attainment results for the child education component and the integration of program component for the 2002-2003 program year were not available for this study.

Responses by the 102 adult learners surveyed indicated they had a positive academic experience. Nearly every adult learner reported making improvement in his or her reading, writing, and math skills during the program year.

The following recommendations would support Kentucky's commitment to family literacy and are based directly on evidence developed during the study. Family literacy in Kentucky is likely to benefit most from the study if the findings are integrated into the staff development provided each year by the KYAE to the family literacy program staff across the state.

Recommendation 1

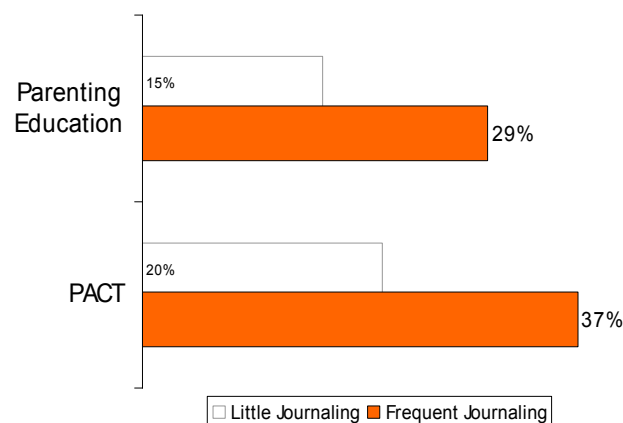
Strengthen the parenting education and PACT components through a well-designed curriculum, including a focus on literacy.

Inasmuch as Kentucky family literacy programs fell short of the state mandated 2002-2003 performance targets in parenting education and PACT, emphasis must be placed on propagating best practices in parenting education and PACT throughout all programs in the state. The responses from the instructors provided evidence that a literacy focus, especially in PACT, led to higher achievement of program performance goals.

Literacy activities tied to books and writing were not always included in PACT activities; however, there is evidence that these activities support good performance.

For example, only 43% described their program as offering time for parents and children to journal together during PACT. Programs that provided such opportunities saw higher achievement on all four performance indicators. Figure 2 presents the observed relationship between journaling and program performance.

Figure 2 ~ Journaling as a Literacy Activity and its Relationship to Performance

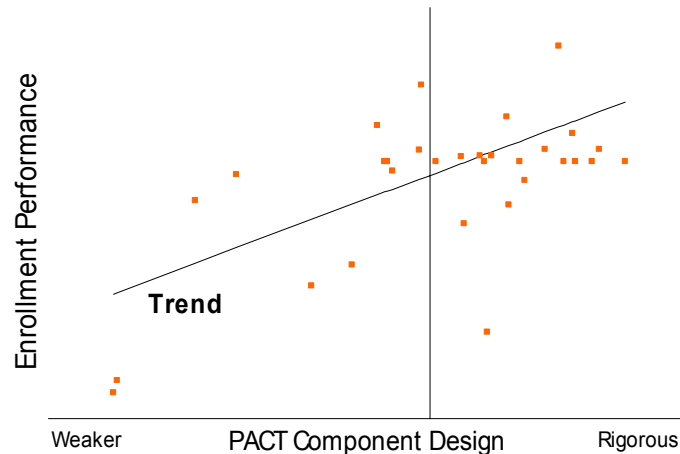


As a second example, a rigorous, well-structured PACT component was found to be significantly related to both enrollment achievement and achievement of Parenting Education goals. The instructor responses identified a rigorous and well-structured PACT component as emphasizing the following:

- Participation in more than four hours of PACT time per week;
- A set schedule for PACT that was the same from week to week;
- Opportunities for parents and children to journal together;
- Opportunities for parents to help their children complete homework;
- Opportunities for parents to practice skills learned in parenting classes;
- Opportunities for parents to discuss and reflect on their PACT experiences.

Figure 3 presents the relationship between a rigorous and structured PACT component and achievement on the enrollment performance indicator.

Figure 3 ~ Structure of the PACT Component



Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Provide staff development to help instructors design parenting education curriculum using a variety of sources. While exclusive use of a pre-determined curriculum and/or textbook are not recommended, their flexible use as one component of the parenting education curriculum can help to provide structure and a literacy focus, especially for new instructors.
- Provide training for instructors in designing a lesson; using a variety of instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, role-playing, hands-on activities, and interactive teaching; and planning ways to connect children's books to parenting education and PACT activities.
- Ensure that all take home parent-child activities are literacy focused and meet parenting and PACT goals.

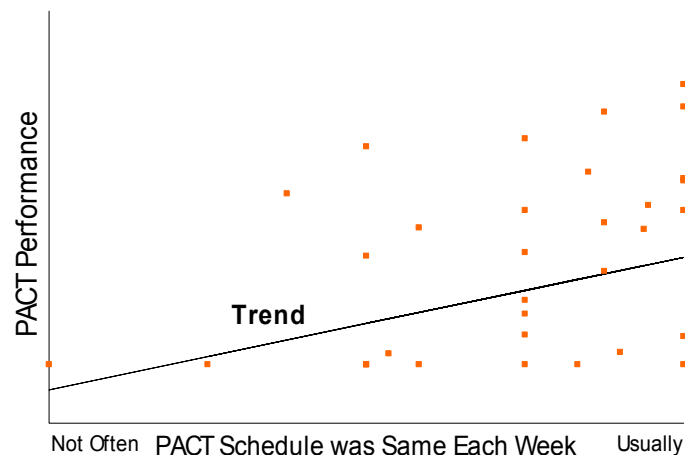
- Place greater emphasis on parents and children reading and writing together and engaging in these activities on a regular, daily basis including promoting regular use of the public library or other community resources.

Recommendation 2

Promote program designs that provide regular, center-based, interactive class time for parenting education and for PACT.

Instructors described how their PACT program was structured during 2002-2003 year. More than 25% of the instructors indicated that their program did not typically provide PACT class time on a set schedule. Programs that were described as offering a set schedule for PACT achieved significantly higher program performance in PACT and parenting education. Programs that were described by the instructors as offering parenting education classes at a separate time from PACT and adult education also observed higher achievement. Figure 3 illustrates the observed association between PACT performance and the provision of PACT on a set schedule.

Figure 3 ~ Effect of Offering PACT on a Set Schedule



Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

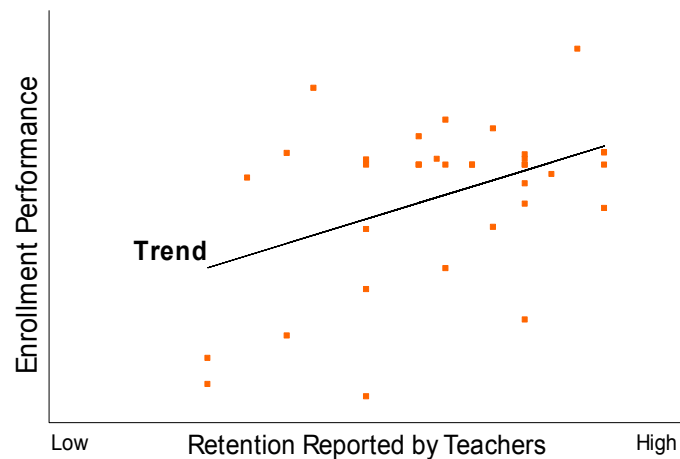
- Work with programs to schedule regular parenting education and PACT classes. Try to limit the range of hours or days when the adult education component is provided to family literacy students to help with scheduling classes. Offer parenting education and PACT on two different days to maintain scheduling flexibility for families.
- For counties serving school-age children, facilitate attendance and the integration of components by scheduling adult education, parenting education, and PACT at the same site and following each other once or twice a week.

Recommendation 3

Identify and promote successful enrollment, retention, and attendance policies.

Instructors were asked to report on retention and attendance in their 2002-2003 programs. Programs with the highest retention, as rated by the instructors, showed significantly higher achievement of PACT and enrollment performance goals. Programs that offered computers as enrollment and attendance incentives achieved 98% of their enrollment goals, on average, whereas, other programs achieved only 86% on average. Figure 4 illustrates the observed relationship between reported retention and performance in meeting program enrollment goals.

Figure 4 ~ Association between Retention and Performance



Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Conduct a research study to examine the results of modifying the definition of enrollment (which is based on a 12-hour requirement) to determine its effect on enrollment, retention, and performance.
- Re-evaluate the target goal of serving families with children from birth to 18. Consider further study to answer the questions, "Is this age range setting the bar too high by counting in older children for which this program may not appropriate, who may be difficult to enroll and retain, and who stretch the services of the program? Is there a more appropriate age range?"
- Provide access to the breakfast and lunch program for families whenever possible.
- Continue to emphasize the need to report thorough, accurate, and timely attendance and retention data on family literacy students, separate from other adult education students.
- Encourage family literacy instructors to use the months when they have fewer students as a time for major recruitment of new families; making personal connections through home

visits; attending professional development activities; planning the new program; and supporting families as they establish goals for the coming year.

- Formally evaluate the effect of computer-incentive based programs on enrollment, retention, attendance, and performance, possibly through pilot program tests.

Recommendation 4

Continue to use technology, including Web-based instruction, in adult education and parenting education curricula as a *supplement* to instruction in a well-rounded interactive program.

Instructors described how their program made use of instruction on computers. Programs described by their instructors as offering instruction to the adult learners on the use of computers to assist children's learning saw higher achievement of their program performance goals in PACT and parenting education. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the instructors indicated such use. Ninety-two percent (92%) described their programs as using computers (or other technology) to assist in the adult education classrooms. These programs also observed significantly higher achievement in PACT and parenting education.

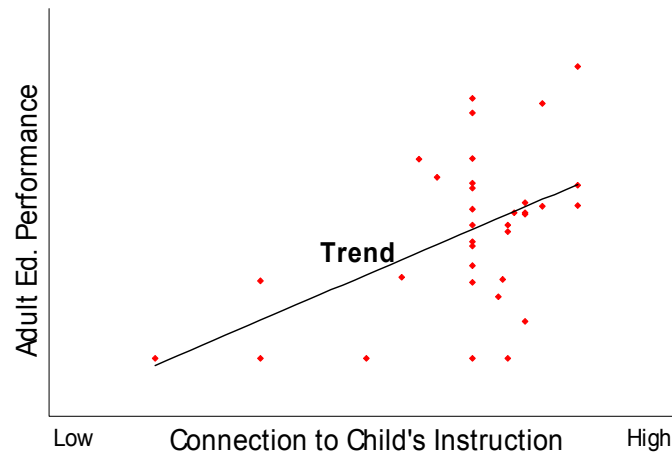
Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Reinforce academic skills and build computer literacy skills through the use of technology in a functional context.

Recommendation 5

Place greater emphasis on an integrated program in which common themes are imbedded in activities and a core message is clearly articulated throughout the components.

Roughly 75% of the instructors described their programs as making connections between the adult education instruction and the children's instruction. The better connected the program, the higher the observed achievement in adult education program goals. Moreover, programs that *identified*, and then communicated, common messages across program components saw higher achievement in all program performance goals. Figure 5 illustrates the observed relationship between the connection of adult education instruction to child instruction, and program performance in adult education.

Figure 5 ~ Integration of Adult Education and Child's Instruction

Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Cross-train adult education teachers to deliver instruction in all components of the program including adult education, parenting education, and PACT.
- Identify methods to promote regularly scheduled local staff meetings to include at a minimum the instructors who serve family literacy students for adult education, parenting education, and PACT.
- Emphasize the importance of preparing parents for the PACT activity during the parenting education time.
- Structure programs to provide opportunities for parents to discuss what happened in the parent and child time.

Recommendation 6

Strengthen collaboration between family literacy programs and their community schools.

Programs which were described by their instructors as offering frequent partnership building activities at schools exhibited higher performance. Additionally, programs which were described by their instructors as including parent attendance at four or more events at their child's school also observed higher performance.

It was estimated state-wide that programs that offered frequent partnership building activities between parents and schools achieved as much as 29% of their PACT performance goals. In contrast, the other programs achieved only 19% of such goals. Moreover, programs with parent attendance at 4 or more events at the child's school achieved 91% of their enrollment goals, whereas, others achieved only 79% of their enrollment goals.

Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Develop state level statements of policy related to the value of collaboration between family literacy and the schools and issue jointly by KYAE and KDE.
- Define the responsibilities of the parenting education coordinator to include regular communication with the teachers of school age children, to serve as advocates for the families in the education system, and to represent family literacy at board meetings and school staff meetings.
- In addition to maintaining contact with each child's teacher, develop a *simple* form for the teacher to complete several times a year to document performance for the child, and in relation to the entire class, for attendance, homework completion, behavior, and parent/teacher interaction as a measure of accountability.
- Make connections in adult education and parenting classes to the role of the parent in participating as an advocate for their child.

Recommendation 7

Support and provide leadership and direction for state level collaboration across agencies providing family literacy services to minimize competition and eliminate duplication.

The county-level collaboration findings would be best supported if aligned with state-level collaboration. Where possible, the KYAE could initiate the development of strategic agreements with other relevant agencies to promote the county level implementation of collaborative efforts, especially between public schools and the family literacy programs.

Actions that could be used to implement this recommendation include:

- Extend the role of KYAE as an advocate for family literacy with other educational agencies, social service agencies, the courts, and other stakeholders to mitigate barriers identified in this study.